ART. VII.—*A Few Notes on the Dialects, Habits, Customs, and Mythology of the Lower Murray Aborigines.* By PETER BEVERIDGE, Esq.

[Read 9th September, 1861.]

The Aborigines herein described inhabit the valley of the Murray River from Lake Boga to the Moornpal Lakes inclusive. They are divided into seven tribes, each tribe having a distinct name, and very nearly a distinct dialect.

They are named as follows :—Boora Boora, Watty Watty, Waiky Waiky, Litchy Litchy, Yairy Yairy, and Darty Darty. Each name is the negative of the dialect spoken by the respective tribes.

These tribes average about fifty-five in number, old and young ; the males preponderate very considerably. The only apparent reason for this excess is because of the great numbers of women who die from their husband's ill-usage, and from diseases, the consequence of their own profligacy. There are very few of either sex under the age of fifteen, and the preponderance of those under that age are by European fathers.

The mortality amongst them during the last fifteen years has been very great indeed. The diseases to which they have chiefly fallen victims, have been of a pulmonary or venereal nature, or a combination of both. They also suffer very much from scurvy during the winter months, when food is scarce, and the blood becomes impoverished by poor diet. They do not appear to have any contagious diseases, such as fevers, &c., although many of the adults are marked with small-pox ; this, however, may have been contracted by the natives in the neighbourhood of Sydney, and passed on from one tribe to another, until it had ravaged the whole country. In speaking of this disease, the old men say that their sufferings were fearful in the extreme, and the deaths so numerous that they could not inter them, therefore they left the bodies where they died, and shifted their camps to some other place. They repeated this manœuvre day after day, until the whole atmosphere was tainted with the decomposing carcases; they thought that not one would escape death, and had arrived at such a pitch of misery as to make them careless whether they died or not. The hot summer, however, set in, when the distemper gradually left them, but it was years before they got over the panic. This seems to

have been the only great terror they ever had, and the only instance they have of great numbers being carried off at one time by the same disease.

Their food consists chiefly of fish, but they have many other kinds, such as kangaroo, emu, opossum, and wild fowl of the aquatic species, abundance of which inhabit the lakes and lagoons. They have also a farinaceous root which grows abundantly on the marshes; it is very nutritious, and quite as palatable as the best potatoes. It can be got in any quantities, but it is hard work digging it up, therefore it is not often procured. The fibre of this root they make into fishing lines and nets; it is very strong, and lasts very long in the water without rotting. They make duck nets of this fibre also, fifty or sixty yards in length, which they stretch across lagoons about three feet from the water, placing themselves at intervals along the lagoon on each side in the trees, waiting until the ducks are put to flight by some one sent for that purpose. As soon as the ducks come wheeling along the lagoon, the natives in the trees imitate the whistle of a hawk, which makes the ducks in fear fly close to the water, and so into the net. Sometimes they catch as many as three dozen at one time in this manner, without a single mesh breaking.

Their dialects are not known to philologists, nor is it possible to obtain a correct knowledge of them, in consequence of the multifarious pronunciations and accentuations used. Their dialects are very meagre and limited; for example, their numerals are confined to two alone, viz., *politi, ryup,* the former signifying two, and the latter one. To express five, they say *ryup murnangin,* or one hand, and to express ten, *politi murnangin,* or two hands. In speaking of a large number, such as fifty, they say *col col,* and if of a very great number, such as a flock of sheep, they say *kirtowel,* or countless. They do not possess any powers of comparison whatever; if asked which of two things is the best, such as flour and sugar, they will reply "twofellow." Hereunder are a few of their proper names:—

*Milloo,* the Murray, or other large river.
*Pannoomilloo,* small river.
*Bamawur,* a creek.
*Pannoo Bamawur,* small creek.
*Hayannie,* water.
*Wanup,* fire.
*Nowie,* the sun.

*Mitiam,* the moon.
*Toort,* a star.
*Kooran Hayannie,* a large water-hole, or lake.

Their pronouns are identical, whether relative to persons or things, masculine or feminine gender. Thus *Wanthy,* for instance, means he, she, it, him, that, their ; other pronouns are used in the same manner.

Their adjectives are used much the same as in English. Thus (*talko*) good, is frequently used alone, the noun being understood. The other adjectives are applied in the same manner.

Their verbs are very imperfect. For example—

*Callo yetty wirwy,* I went.
*Callo mitha yetty wirwy,* I went a long time ago.
*Yetty wirwy,* I go, or am going.
*Datty yetty wirwy,* I will go.
*Berha yetty wirwy,* I will go to-morrow.
*Urgin berha yetty wirwy,* I will go the day after to-morrow.

These examples are only applicable to the Watty Watty tribe; all the other dialects, however, are just as meagre, and similarly constructed.

The dialect spoken by the Lake Boga tribe is not understood by the members of the Moornpal one, but there are one or two men in each tribe who speak and can understand all the dialects. These men are termed *gualla wattow,* signifying postmen. They can travel with impunity from one hostile tribe to another, as their persons are deemed sacred. They carry news with amazing rapidity, and conduct all kinds of negotiations in the way of barter, and as one tribe possesses what another tribe lacks, it gives these postmen plenty of travelling ; from their continual intercourse with other tribes, they are much more enlightened than the generality of the natives, and are therefore deemed by their respective tribes as oracles and authorities, who may not be doubted or disputed with.

There are no ceremonies connected with their marriages, and polygamy is permitted to any extent. In taking wives, they pay great respect to consanguinity. They carry this so far that they will not even take a cousin to wife. This custom, however, does not hold good in their sexual intercourse, as incest is of very frequent occurrence. Chastity is quite unknown amongst them, and not cared for. This

state of things is induced by the elders (men and women), recounting lewd tales and traditions by their camp fires, and by their promiscuous manner of sleeping, and huddling together in their rude gunyaas.

No man can get a wife unless he has a sister or female ward to give in exchange, and in too many instances the father of a grown up son will (instead of allowing the son to have his sister to exchange for a wife) exchange his daughter for a young wife for himself, although, perhaps, he may have two or three wives already, and no one has a right to say anything against it. The elders of a tribe will not let the young men go to other tribes to steal wives, as that would entail a feud, and probably an onslaught to recover the abducted wife or wives, when perhaps many lives would be lost; thus, therefore, a poor fellow who has no female relative under his control, must perforce live all his life a bachelor, and the worst part of it is, that he is perfectly aware of it from his earliest years.

Sometimes two brothers-in-law will quarrel, when the first thing they do (if it become serious) is to take each his respective sister away from the other, although they may each have babies, and exchange them away with some one else. Quarrels of this kind very often arise, and this summary method of settlement is deemed perfectly just.

The children receive no education; as soon as they can run about, they are allowed to do whatever they please, without reference to any one; their parents have not the slightest control over them. They have no system of teaching patience, endurance of pain, or privation; in fact, the children and adults are woefully deficient in everything good or virtuous.

The sports of the children are merely the occupations of their riper years in miniature.

They arrive at puberty about the age of thirteen; girls of that age are oftentimes mothers. An instance of twins being born is unknown.

When a woman becomes a widow, she falls back to her father or brother, as the case may be, and if not too old, she is exchanged for a young wife the first convenient opportunity. The woman's feelings are never studied in matrimonial proceedings.

They cook their food by means of red hot clay placed over the bottom and round the sides of a hole prepared for that purpose. Over the hot clay they place a thin layer of damp

grass, upon which they lay the joint to be cooked, covering it over also with damp grass, upon which more hot clay is placed, the whole is then carefully covered over with sand. It is a very perfect method, and can be made large enough to roast an ox, or small enough to cook an opossum.

They have no exhilarating drinks, but when half civilised, become very fond of European ones.

They have very little capacity for lengthened physical exertion. This may probably arise from a want of energy, rather than from lack of thews and sinews; be that as it may, an average Englishman will tire the natives one after the other, when physical exertion is requisite.

The males and females have no distinguishing dress; the only dress is the opossum rug, which is worn in many instances very becomingly across the shoulders with one arm out. They do not possess any holiday costume, for the simple reason that they have no particular holidays. They make necklaces of reeds and crayfish legs, which they wear round the neck; this, with the reed through the middle cartilage of the nose, and an occasional crimson band round the brow, are the only ornaments they care about. Of course, this is speaking of them in their natural state; of late years they have adopted many of the customs and habits of Europeans.

They have great gatherings during the summer for wrestling (in which exercise they excel), and corroberee dances, to both of which they are very partial. The dances and songs are generally of a lewd nature, the latter consisting of two or three lines continuously repeated to a tune, the time of which they keep admirably; the former is only a series of grotesque hops and lewd postures, all however in excellent time.

They have not any idea of games of chance or gambling, although prone to imbibe the other vicious habits of the Europeans, with whom they come in contact.

They have no religion, but believe in a Good Spirit, who, if in good humour, looks down upon their nets and fishing lines with a favourable eye, and the consequence is a great haul. They have no ceremonies for propitiating the favour of this Spirit, his good or bad humour being dependent entirely upon his good or bad health. His name is *Gnawdenoorte.*

They have an idea of an Evil Spirit also whom they call *Gnambacootehela;* they are very much afraid of him in the dark, and impute all their ill luck to his influence. If a turkey's nest has been scratched out by a wild dog, or a swan's

nest been robbed by a crow, in each case the evil spirit in question is blamed. They go so far as to pretend to show the spirit's tracks, when there is nothing to show, unless perhaps some slight depressions of gigantic size, attributable to the action of water, or other natural agent; if laughed at for their absurdity, they become very cross, and ask how a white man can understand black fellow's affairs better than a black fellow.

They speak of a Water Spirit as well, whose presence is death to the beholder, unless he be one of the initiated, two or three of whom are to be found in each tribe. The initiated are termed *Bungals*, signifying doctors; occasionally these learned men disappear for two or three days together, and come back with bleared eyes and humid garments, and tell extraordinary stories of the wonders they beheld in the water spirit's domicile in the bottom of the river, and the simple natives give perfect credence to every thing told them, no matter how gross or glaring the falsehoods may be.

The only thing in the shape of magic found amongst them is the power they imagine themselves to possess, of making any one member of a hostile tribe sick, and more sick until he dies. Their method of proceeding is this: if they can procure any of the remains of a piece of meat from which the person they wish to kill has eaten (such as bones), they collect them carefully together, and wrap them tightly round with native twine, and then smear the whole over with fat. After this is completed, if they wish to kill the person at once, they kindle a fire, upon which they place the bones, and whilst the bones are being consumed, they chant some very monotonous incantation continuously, until the bones are reduced to ashes, and then scatter the ashes to the four winds and the person is dead.

If they wish to prolong the sufferings of their foe, they merely burn a small portion of the bones every night, chanting the incantation during the process, and if it takes a month or two to complete the destruction of the bones, so long will the victim's torture last. They attribute all deaths and sickness amongst them to this cause, and nothing will persuade them to the contrary. If a white man asks them to practise so on him, they will laugh at the seeming absurdity of the idea, and say, "O too much fear white fellow." Whether we are to infer that their magic would be of no avail on a white man, or whether they are in too much terror of the law to put it in practice, it is difficult to say.

They are a very short-lived people, being old and grey at twenty-five or thirty. Very few of the women live so long, being generally worn out by disease and drudgery before they have even arrived at the former of these ages.

The sick are very carefully attended, more especially the males, who having no contagious diseases, their friends have no fear of contracting sickness from contact with them. They practice bleeding very largely, upon the cupping system, for many of their distempers. Their method is this: they scarify the part from which they wish to take the blood, and suck the place, until they have taken what they think sufficient. This practice is very effectual in the removal of headaches, from which they suffer very much.

For pulmonary affections and rheumatism, they make use of the vapour baths. This they construct after the fashion of their ovens, and the patient is walled up much in the same manner as a joint about to be cooked. They receive great benefit from this system, but only make use of it in extreme cases, as it takes a great deal of trouble and toil to prepare it.

They wrap their dead in rugs, and bury them four or five feet deep, in every instance with the feet to the east; all the clothes and property of the deceased are buried with him.

If a person of weight or consideration in the tribe, they build a neat hut over his grave, and cover it with bark or thatch, and strew the grave, or floor of the hut, with grass from time to time. The grave is enclosed by a fence formed in a diamond shape, the grave being in the very middle. Inside of the fence they keep quite free from weeds, and have it swept perfectly clean. This they continue for about two years. After that time the tomb is allowed to fall into decay, until in the course of a few years the very site of it is forgotten.

If a woman, or person of little note dies, they merely cover them up in some soft sandhill out of their sight, and there is no more about them. Their dogs often scratch them up, and feast upon the bodies. Of this the natives only make fun, deeming it a fine subject upon which to display their wit.

After a person dies, his name is never mentioned by any chance. If they wish to speak of him at all, which is very rare indeed, they do so by saying such a one (a cousin of the deceased perhaps), is a "poor fellow;" more than this they cannot be got to say on the subject.

If by chance any one of the tribe to which the deceased belonged bears the same name, he immediately adopts another, and his original one is forgotten.

When they die they imagine that they become birds or beasts, and inhabit the localities they used to frequent prior to death.

Their huts are merely sheds thrown up against the wind, consisting of bark or reeds, if the weather be wet, and of a few boughs only if fine. An assemblage of their huts might be called a village, but they are erected without any reference to order, and according to the whim of the intending occupant.

They have no monuments in commemoration of particular events, nor have they any works of art beyond their implements of war or chase.

The chiefs have very limited powers; the chieftainship goes by seniority, *i. e.*, the oldest man in the tribe is generally deemed the head thereof.

They are not divided into clans, castes, or grades, but live on a perfect footing of equality.

They have no existing laws; the strong occasionally steals from the weak, and laughs at the victim if he remonstrates with them. Generally, however, they are very honest amongst themselves.

They do not possess any courts of law, nor have they any judges. The only trials they ever have are for murder, and then the culprit has to stand up as a target to be speared at for about twenty minutes. If he escape, as is usually the case, he is received upon the same footing as prior to the commission of the crime, and he is thought just as much of. They never keep any prisoners, as no offence is deemed worthy of punishment except murder, and then the ordeal follows immediately on the commission of the crime.

They have the most vague ideas of geography. They imagine the earth to be one immense plain, with here and there a river, creek, mountain, and hill, and that the Murray is the largest, deepest, and sweetest water on it, and that it has no end, and runs for ever.

They think there is a new sun every day, and that it is a large fire, being weak in the morning when it is newly kindled, and becoming hotter towards noon, as it spreads, then gradually becoming less powerful towards evening, until it goes out entirely when it is night.

With regard to the moon, they think it lasts thirty nights,

and is composed of some shiny substance. They account for this by saying it gives no warmth like the sun; they compare it to an opossum rug in this way. When a native begins to make a rug, as soon as he has procured a few skins, he sews them together, and wears them on some part of his person, going on adding to it daily, but wearing it all the time, until at last it becomes a finished rug. After this, of course, it gradually begins to fray at the edges, until, like the moon, it is worn out; then they commence a new one in the same way.

They have tales and legends about nearly every planet in the heavens, but it would lengthen this paper too much to transcribe them here.

They make canoes from the bark of the red gum; they generally select a tree with a bend in it for this purpose, as that saves them a great many hours work in the manufacture of their tiny craft; because if they use the bark of a straight stem they have to give it the necessary curve at each end by means of fire. They use these frail vessels very dexterously in the pursuit of fish, which they spear with the paddle, which has hooked grains at one end made of kangaroo leg bones.

They also chase swans and other aquatic birds during the moulting season, and capture canoe loads of them. Each male adult is the proprietor of a canoe, and he values it more than any other thing he possesses.

The only domestic animal they have is the native dog; they use these animals for hunting, and for food in the winter time, when game is scarce, and the winter boisterous.

They have no set terms for declaring war; their only mode of warfare is to creep into the camp of their foe, and when all are hushed in sleep, slay all who cannot get away, irrespective of age or sex. After the *mêlée* they cut off the limbs of their victims, and carry them home in triumph, recounting all sorts of grandiloquent stories (as to the prowess displayed during the fight) whilst feasting on the flesh of their poor victims.

They have no method of commemorating victories, nor do they possess any poems of a national character, but they have some oral traditions of their origin.

Infanticide is often practised, and meals are too often made by mothers of their own offspring. This practice is attributable to laziness principally, for if a mother has two

children, one two years old, and the other just born, she is sure to destroy the youngest.

In the traditions respecting their origin, they say that they were all birds and beasts, and that there was no sun, but darkness dwelt upon the land; but a quarrel arising between an emu and a native companion, the latter threw an egg of the former up to the sky, when it broke on a pile of wood seemly prepared for that purpose by the Good Spirit (*Gnawderoot*) when the concussion produced fire, and the earth was flooded with light, and the Good Spirit saw that it was an improvement upon the darkness, therefore he has continued to light it up every morning since that time. Immediately upon the sun making his first appearance, those of the birds and beasts who had been good, and had striven to assist their fellows when in trouble, and looked after their food, without reference to what their neighbours fed upon, were at once converted into blackfellows, and had their ancient fellows, who had been grumblers, given to them to prey upon. This is one of the two only instances of rewards and punishments for good and bad conduct on record. The other one is in the use of a wicked old bustard, who lived before the sun shone on the earth, and who used to kill and feed upon his own species, dwelling upon the margin of a nice plain, where delicious yams grew in abundance, and to which plain bustards used to come from all quarters to feed upon the milky roots. This wicked old wretch would watch with impatience in the glowing afternoons until an unwary young bustard would single out from his fellows, to have his siesta under some shady qundong tree, away from the turmoil and noise of the crowd, when he would never again wake, but to find the death-grip of the ogre on his throat. This ruthless old vagabond had continued this sort of thing as long as the most ancient bustard could remember, but it had now arrived at such a pitch that the bustard people were everlastingly in mourning for their lost ones, and nothing was heard but wailing in every corner of Bustardy. At last two young bustards who had travelled in strange lands, and lived amongst extraordinary beasts, returned home just when the bustards were at their wit's end, and seriously thinking of making a general exodus to other countries, where they might feed in peace. On learning the cause of all this wailing and misery, these two smart young travellers laid their wise heads together to devise some means of ridding the nation of this terrible pest. Hitting

upon this plan, they were to get, if possible, on to the great yam plains unperceived by the wicked old bird. One was to hide in the tall yam stalks, and the other was to pretend to feed, and afterwards to sleep, and when the old beast came to procure his disgusting meal, at a preconcerted signal they were to fall upon him and slay him, and so rid Bustardy for ever of the worst monster that ever lived. All of this they succeded in carrying out effectually, and when being feasted and caressed by the whole Bustard nation who had congregated to do honour to those gallant young slayers of the hideous monster, they suddenly soared away in curling whirls, higher and higher, until they reached the sky, and became the two stars that always point to the southern cross. The consternation and grief of the poor bustards was immense, when they saw their two deliverers soaring away towards the heavens, but when they saw them fixed as stars, they danced with joy, saying the earth was not good enough for them, and that they were better rewarded for the great good they had done on earth, by being made two such brilliant stars, than if all the bustards in the world had given them everything they possessed; and these two beautiful stars can easily see from their glorious position, how everlastingly grateful all the Bustard people are, and will be; and gratitude is to them as the fragrance of the myall is to the nostrils of the yam feeding bustards.

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## Art. VIII.—*On Dry Rot.* By Thomas S. Ralph, Esq., M.R.C.S., &c.

[Abstract of paper, the original read 30th September, 1861.]

The various kinds of fungus were shown, interlaced with the woody fibre. The rot might take place externally in timber, in damp and dark places; yet it was commonly found in such a position as left no room to doubt that it must have grown up inside the tree before it was cut down.

The remarks were chiefly in reference to pines, but Mr. Ralph stated his intention of prosecuting his researches on the same subject in connection with the woods of this country